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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002587

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [TU](#) [IR](#) [KDP](#)

SUBJECT: KURDS WANT MAXIMUM DECENTRALIZATION WITHOUT INDEPENDENCE

Classified By: Classified by David M. Satterfield, Deputy Chief of Miss

ion, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11.](#) (U) This is a REO Kirkuk cable.

[12.](#) (C) . (C) SUMMARY. Key Kurdish leaders told DCM and MNF-I Political Military and Economic Affairs Chief on June 13-15 that they cannot accept "provincial" or "administrative" federalism and will focus instead on pursuing "historic geographic" federalism. They define the Kurdistan region however as one with more south-reaching boundaries, a process that the TAL stipulates must not precede the constitution. END SUMMARY.

[13.](#) (C) DCM Satterfield and MNF-I Commander for Political, Military and Economic relations MG Hank Stratman discussed the federalism with senior KDP and PUK officials in the Kurdistan Region June 13-14. RC Kirkuk (notetaker) and DCM assistant also attended the meetings. The issue also surfaced in the context of the swearing-in pf Kurdistan's new president Massoud Barzani on June 14.

Talabani Strikes the Right Tone

[14.](#) (C) In his remarks at the swearing in, Iraq's President and PUK Secretary General Jalal Talabani declared that Kurds must seek "a free Kurdistan within a free Iraq." He spoke at length in Arabic to make visiting Iraqis feel welcome. He welcomed them not as guests however, but as the "owners of a house in which all of us live as family." Barzani also kicked off remarks in Arabic, but focused in his speech more on federal and democratic elements of the state, while Talabani focused more on pluralism and unity.

Historic Geographic Federalism

[15.](#) (C) PUK Deputy Noshirwan Mustafa focused intently on decentralization. He said the region was plagued by oriental, Arabic, despotism. Kurds now have signed on to a unified framework of one state, but only if the Arabs do not attempt to define the state in terms of Arab nationalist goals. DCM noted that the U.S. supports decentralization, but a clearly delimited one. Mustafa said Baghdad should allow the regions to develop their own education, judicial, health, agriculture, banking systems, while the center would continue to control defense and foreign affairs.

[16.](#) (C) Both Mustafa and Kurdistan National Assembly speaker Adnan Mufti told DCM that Kurds would never accept "administrative" federalism (Iraq administered on the basis of its 18 governorates). They both also spoke of "historic geographic" federalism as the better basis for governance. Mustafa indicated said Iraq south of Kurdistan could conceivably be divided into multiple regions.

[17.](#) (C) KRG-Sulimaniya Prime Minister Omar Fattah told DCM that the Kurds are for a united Iraq, but that they constitute a "separate nation." The Kurdistan region must have strong relations with Baghdad, it should have its own budget like any U.S. state and pay tax to the center. The Ba'athist model in which the center doled out all the money would not be accepted. Drawing on the U.S. comparison, DCM said the U.S. government manages natural resources nationally to bring benefit to all citizens. This should be the model for Iraq.

Independence Does Not Serve Kurds' Interests

[18.](#) (C) Mustafa was pragmatic on Kurds' options, noting it would be difficult to settle borders with neighbors who would be hostile. Further, this independence would shut the Kurds out of a potential market of 22 Arab states. Independent Kurdistan would be hopelessly weak, but as part of Iraq, would gain great leverage regionally. He agreed with DCM that the era of mini-states was over. What the Kurds want, he said, is "complete decentralization without independence." PUK politburo executive committee chairman Kosrat Rasul said that if Iraq is truly democratic and federal and Article 58 is implemented fully, Kurds would not demand independence.

KRG Presidency Law

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9. (C) The new KRG presidency law, passed June 7, notes that the President of the region will represent the citizens of Kurdistan "locally and internationally and coordinate between the federal and regional authorities." In this regard, Massoud Barzani told DCM that the Kurds were unified on Kirkuk and their relations with Baghdad. He was traveling to Baghdad June 16 to begin sorting out aspects of the relationship.

10. (U) REO Basrah, REO Hillah, REO Mosul, and REO Kirkuk minimize considered.

Jeffrey